

HOWARD KIMELDORF INTERVIEWS FOR REDS OR RACKETS?

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GEORGE MORRIS OF THE *DAILY WORKER*

INTERVIEWEE: GEORGE MORRIS

INTERVIEWERS: HOWARD KIMELDORF

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[00:00:00] **HOWARD KIMELDORF:** This is part one of an interview with George Morris taking place on September second, 1980. I've already explained briefly of the thrust of what I'm after and I wanted to refer initially to an article that you wrote for the *Daily Worker*? "Tale of Two Waterfronts," a series of four articles back in 1953?

[00:00:24] **GEORGE MORRIS:** Well I started on the *Daily Worker* since 1934. And I've been on it ever since.

[00:00:30] **HOWARD:** And what's your relationship with the paper?

[00:00:32] **GEORGE:** I writing the columns three times a week. Currently, as well. I have a column—the column that I began in '44 actually. I began to work on the paper in '34, but as a column I began in '44 and it's been going regularly ever since.

[00:00:55] **HOWARD:** Okay, let me come back on that a little later on, what I wanted to ask you about is the series of four articles in the New York *Daily Worker* titled “The Tale of Two Waterfronts,” I don't know if you remember that?

[00:01:05] **GEORGE:** The what?

[00:01:06] **HOWARD:** “The Tale of Two Waterfronts”? The series of four articles?

[00:01:11] **GEORGE:** That's a pamphlet.

[00:01:12] **HOWARD:** In 1953, yeah I guess it came out in a pamphlet which I haven't seen.

[00:01:15] **GEORGE:** It was pamphlet, I may have a duplicate.

[00:01:17] **HOWARD:** Well I'll have to see that because I haven't been able to get it.

[00:01:19] **GEORGE:** If it's not broken into the pieces. Just remind me later.

[00:01:26] **HOWARD:** One of the things I wanted to ask you about there was you seemed to imply—one of the things I'm looking at is the comparison between [Joe] Ryan's union [International Longshore Association] and [Harry] Bridges' union [International Longshore and Warehouse Union], essentially. And you seem to imply that the strength of Ryan's union was basically in terms of terrorism against rank-and-file progressives and corruption. If that's the case, how would you explain the strength of ILA and other places south of New York where the corruption isn't as obvious, or in the Gulf Coast areas? Do you have any sense for why he had support among the Gulf Coast workers, for instance?

[00:02:01] **GEORGE:** Well the Gulf Coast workers were a later development in the ILA's history. The ILA was primarily a union that operated in New York, New England. And not much below Norfolk [Virginia] and the others came later, especially down through the Gulf, past Florida. They certainly came later. So you have there some corruption there too, but it's more influenced from the basic corruption center which is in the east. And the union basically remains today, a very corrupt union. In fact, its most important officer, the Vice President—who I think he has the title of Executive Vice President—is under a five-year sentence for strike insurance.

[00:02:58] **HOWARD:** Is that right? What's his name?

[00:03:01] **GEORGE:** He's the head of the Brooklyn local, which is the largest.

[00:03:04] **HOWARD:** Oh, I just read about that.

[00:03:05] **GEORGE:** Local number 1818 [sic, now]. He's the son-in-law of the guy who was—what the hell's his name? The guy who was involved in Murder Incorporated.

[00:03:14] **HOWARD:** [Albert] Anastasia?

[00:03:14] **GEORGE:** Anastasia! He was the son-in-law of Anastasia. [sic, Anthony Scotto was son-in-law of Anthony Anastasio, who was brother to Albert Anastasia] That's right. But the thing is that he is considered what you may call an intellectual racketeer. He went through some education. [pre-law at Brooklyn College]

[00:03:30] **HOWARD:** Oh law school, right? Is that the law school?

[00:03:32] **GEORGE:** That's right. And he, what he did was he evolved that Brooklyn local, you see the industry moved to Brooklyn to a large extent. The New York docks, the West Side docks, those facing the Hudson River were pretty much played out in there. They do very little now—some passengers—

[00:03:54] **HOWARD:** Why is that? Do you know why that's so?

[00:03:58] **GEORGE:** Well reason is there's not enough space. See with the containers coming in and the requirement of a great deal of space, both for the containers as well as for the cargo that's unloaded, in much larger quantities now. So that you may have a ship that's unloaded in almost no time. You have to take a container off and then you open them up and then you distribute the contents to wherever they're destined and so forth. So you need much more space. So they had to move. So first of all, you couldn't build these containerized operations. These big machinery to pick up the big, the whole size of a crane car, loaded with materials. Well those things are the common thing now, so that New York docks was absolutely unfit for it. They were built for a different age. And Brooklyn offered much bigger space, and not only Brooklyn but further out toward [New] Jersey.

[00:05:03] **HOWARD:** Now was Brooklyn the core of the union in terms of the—even in the local—?

[00:05:08] **GEORGE:** It was. Brooklyn was a minor part of the union. The docks there were small. The major dock work was on the West Side, along the Manhattan front. You know how Manhattan is located?

[00:05:20] **HOWARD:** Not really, unfortunately.

[00:05:21] **GEORGE:** Well Manhattan Island goes a long—it's along the Hudson, and the docks were all along the shore. And that was the old docks, docks that existed for a long time. You ought to get a map and take a look at them now, just to an idea of it—a visual concept. And those docks are out-of-date now. The only thing that I think that's left—and there's very little passenger work. The United States has hardly any passenger work anymore. So that you had certain docks where foreign passengers, cruisers and so forth would come in, but that's all. They don't need containers. No problem. But anything that involves containers, and that's the big technological change in the maritime industry in recent years. They had to move to Brooklyn and beyond Brooklyn through Jersey and other places, so this—what the hell is his name? He built up that local, 1818 by amalgamating any small locals in Brooklyn, and making them one, big Brooklyn local which became the major local of the ILA. By virtue of that, he became the major officer you might say—except the what the hell is his name?

[00:06:47] **HOWARD:** [Thomas] Gleason?

[00:06:48] **GEORGE:** Whose now the president and he's simply formally the president. He's actually retiring. And this is the guy who was running the union, or he was the major officer or major power anyway. Also he's been convicted of strike insurance. Accepting some \$200,000.

[00:07:13] **HOWARD:** Anastasia is the gentleman you're speaking of?

[00:07:15] **GEORGE:** Not Anastasia, but his son-in-law.

[00:07:17] **HOWARD:** Oh, his son-in-law.

[00:07:18] **GEORGE:** What the hell is his name? [Anthony Scotto]

[00:07:22] **HOWARD:** Yeah, I remember, but I can't think of it either, but I know who you're talking about though.

[00:07:25] **GEORGE:** I don't know. At my age I forget a lot of names.

[00:07:34] **HOWARD:** Yeah, I do too at mine.

[00:07:35] **GEORGE:** So you can get it—I can look it up for you.

[00:07:35] **HOWARD:** Yeah, I've seen the reference.

[00:07:35] **GEORGE:** So for a period, he appeared like the progressive. Because he has introduced a lot of welfare to the local. The local became the largest in the union and he introduced a big, welfare hall health system. And for the longshoremen, at the same time he opened the door pretty much for the Italians coming in from Italy. They come in illegally and tomorrow they're already working for the docks. That kind of stuff. So that he built up that support himself.

[00:08:11] **HOWARD:** Okay, let me return to the question—the question about the Gulf Coast then, is there any particularly explanation why Gulf Coast workers would be loyal to a guy like Ryan who was up to his neck in corruption?

[00:08:22] **GEORGE:** First of all, the ILA was organizing. By virtue of—you see, the Gulf Coast is really a part of the Atlantic Ocean. Its outlet goes into the Atlantic. So there's one shore from Maine down to Galveston [Texas] And the relationship between them, technically as such that it was inevitable that they'd have to organize and get part of the ILA. Now at one time, the ILWU tried to get them.

[00:08:54] **HOWARD:** I know.

[00:08:56] **GEORGE:** But lost the election because it was naturally unfit for that situation, aside for the moral aspect.

[00:09:03] **HOWARD:** In just the economic stuff, the situation anyway.

[00:09:05] **GEORGE:** Because economically, it was one shore! It was the west side versus the east side. The Gulf was not a separate coast.

[00:09:15] **HOWARD:** So you see it then in terms of the reason that both workers may have been loyal to Ryan or someone alike to Ryan was because it was economically integrated—?

[00:09:21] **GEORGE:** Well there was a number of things involved. First of all, in the government's office agents, the government didn't want the ILWU.

[00:09:30] **HOWARD:** What action did they take to eliminate that?

[00:09:32] **GEORGE:** Well, the action they'd take is they destroyed it in various ways. First of all, the government influence in the docks in various places was very important. And that preference for the ILA and the deals with the ILA. And the companies, above all, the companies! Their preference for the ILA was because they had better terms with the ILA, they made deals with the ILA, they could bribe them. And that's the situation that they had.

[00:10:03] **HOWARD:** But then you can argue the same thing on the West Coast, then. That the employers would have preferred the ILA—?

[00:10:09] **GEORGE:** No, but there it's a different situation. West Coast had an entirely different background.

[00:10:13] **HOWARD:** We'll get to that in a second. So one of things I'm looking at is the loyalty of the rank-and-file to different leaders. So, in the case of Ryan it's that they were there, they had—

[00:10:22] **GEORGE:** In the case of Ryan, Ryan never had a base among the rank-and-file.

[00:10:27] **HOWARD:** Yeah, I didn't think so.

[00:10:29] **GEORGE:** I covered the racketeering hearings in New York everyday throughout all the months that it took place, and I saw Ryan get on the stand there and they had him [inaudible]. And he had no support from the rank-and-file at all. Periodically there was an upsurge of strikes and these were strikes under the leadership of the rank-and-file committee which wouldn't even know his name, you know. Its spokesman was not publicly known. It was a—because it was dangerous for anybody to come forward and say, 'I speak for the rank-and-file.'

So what you had was a rank-and-file paper put out, and the paper would be mimeograph paper sheet put out, and it would give an indication to the rank-and-file to what was coming. It would be an advance of let's say, the next contract negotiation. They'd put forward demands, and you had a dual arrangement. But you had periodically, time and again, now there were people, they would call me up, at the paper they would let me know, somebody was speaking for the rank-and-file and tell me things they wanted to do and so forth. But no one would dare show his face! Because he'd be knocked off.

[00:12:03] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you about Joe Panto [sic, Pete Panto disappeared in 1939, body found 1941] you had something in there, what—do you have any sense of the kind of support that he had, because that would've been a pretty important—

[00:12:10] **GEORGE:** Joe [sic] Panto was an example of what happens to a guy. He would up in a cement barrel, sure. What—after such an example by Joe [sic] Panto and a few others, people didn't want to commit suicide.

[00:12:29] **HOWARD:** I can understand that, but you see, in some cases, repression breeds resistance as you know. And other cases—repression can breed resistance, and so you know when they eliminated someone—

[00:12:38] **GEORGE:** The word resistance, what does—it was in a form that—well it was to safeguard to people who led, sure. Now, the various people who were involved in the leadership, they were not necessarily communist. In fact, none of them were actually communist, they were just good rank-and-filers. But the point is that in at least three major occasions, they tied up the whole waterfront, the whole waterfront! And Ryan was just helpless. So Ryan would go and negotiate and whatever they—and the ship owners would tell him, "Who in the hell are you? You're not the one who tied up the waterfront, we want to talk to the people—"

So what they would have to do is to come to terms that would satisfy the rank-and-file, and the rank-and-file would tell them orders and say, Okay, go back to work. Ryan could ask them and scream that they should get back to work, but nobody paid attention to him. But then, you'd get this underground [pause] tip and that's it. So that's what you had—they got—you had similar situations in other movements. There was a time when communists were in the same, more or less, situation. But the practice had led to other conditions. To the policy of certain unions. Just branding opposition, whether you're communist or something else. And so you had that

problem in the Teamsters union, you have it in the labor union, you have it in certain building trade unions. The racketeering is still a factor, it's still a problem. When take a look at the pension problem. There's no revival in investigation in the Teamsters' pension fund and the labor's pension fund. Because you have racketeering that's milking these funds, using those funds as loans to racketeers in Las Vegas [Nevada], operations of that sort. So that you have this kind of racketeering still in force And in the longshoremen, for example.

[00:15:13] **HOWARD:** The difficult thing for me to understand is Ryan was obviously corrupt and he was inefficient leader and he wasn't doing things for the rank-and-file, how was he able to stay in power for as long as he did? I don't think it could be simply terrorism or—?

[00:15:27] **GEORGE:** Look, you'll have—you had in New York, only on the West Side docks, numerous locals. And each one of those fink men, they were locals of 500, 600, 700 people. And each dock was the base for the fink men who collected all sorts of types. To a large extent it was controlling the kickback rackets and the jobs there were always on a shape-up basis. The shape-up meant that people just simply gathered on the waterfront early in the morning, where a ship was supposed to—was expected, and the work was due. And the foreman would simply come up and say, "You, you, you, you." That's it. So the selection of a guy for a job was worth something, and it meant kickbacks. So these people were collecting, they all had an interest in maintaining this system. Of kickbacks, of doing a lot of robbing cargo and there's a whole operation there with all this appropriated cargo, illegally that was sold and all sorts of rackets like that were developed. And Ryan's main weapon was that he is the guardian against communism.

[00:17:16] **HOWARD:** Why did workers fall for that then?

[00:17:17] **GEORGE:** What's that?

[00:17:17] **HOWARD:** Why did workers fall for the anti-communism that he was feeding them?

[00:17:20] **GEORGE:** Well, on the one hand, they fall for that because of the general propaganda. They didn't know any more about communism, they know about [?Romanism?]. And they believed it was something wicked. They don't know anything, they don't read about it. They're only concerned about their own detailed affairs. And secondly, because of the fact that many workers were pragmatic! And a guy who was interested in maintaining his job at a certain dock—that is the privilege of being picked when the shape-up comes along, such other favors as they could get—to him that's number one! And that's everyone.

So you had—there are whole conditions affecting some 25,000 workers. in various locals. And they were kind of a federation of racketeers.

[00:18:18] **HOWARD:** So, some of the spoils must have trickled down to the rank-and-file? Right? In order for them to maintain that—

[00:18:24] **GEORGE:** Well the thing is, the rank-and-file was responsive. You can talk about moral things until you were blue in the face, it didn't mean a goddamn—. They were responsive on the economic questions. Well, one for example is the container question. Well, the problem with container. It meant dropping off 50 percent of the jobs. So the big question was how to handle this big container question to preserve jobs. So the argument was, well for example, with—when a container comes in, only a longshoreman has a right to distribute the cargo in there and pack it and load it on the Teamsters trucks at the dock. While the employer said, 'Why should he go through all of that? We just simply take that goddamn container and put in on a trailer, and take it 100 miles, 200 miles inland somewhere. And there we'll unpack it by our own people!' At a much cheaper rate than

what the longshoremen get—that kind of thing. Well, these issues are the dominant issues. They're the ones that moved the rank-and-file, as in all cases in every union.

[00:19:30] **HOWARD:** Sure, that makes sense.

[00:19:32] **GEORGE:** So, what you have is a struggle on the economic issues, but at the same time, Ryan and his gang were making themselves acceptable to the government and to reactions in general by their professed claim that they are guardians against communism.

[00:19:55] **HOWARD:** I guess the thing is, my reading about what Ryan was doing in the union is that he didn't deliver the economic benefits. They accused him of—

[00:20:01] **GEORGE:** No! No, he had to deliver them, but on the pressure of these kind of rank-and-file movements.

[00:20:06] **HOWARD:** Yeah, but the thing to me is on these rank-and-file—

[00:20:07] **GEORGE:** And he'd come to the employers and say, "Look, I can't do anything about it." And the guy, so you'll have to do this and that and he'd negotiate.

[00:20:15] **HOWARD:** You'd get five-cents an hour.

[00:20:17] **GEORGE:** The thing is—I'll give you a practical example of how this whole system works. The Soviet Union had been a big exporter of furs. A shipload of furs came for a delivery to a big fur association in the United States. It was docked at Newark [New Jersey] . Newark Docks. That was in '52. Now this all came on at these hearings, these racketeering hearings, which was all clearly explained by the very association heads, came and exposed the whole thing. Now, the two business agents of the local involved, they suddenly became very patriotic, they organized a picket line and said they didn't want any Soviet furs. They were against communism and this communist furs. Well that went on for several days and the papers at the time—all the papers gave it a lot of publicity, patriotic committees. Well, meanwhile, in the warehouse of the fur association, where the furs were supposed to be unloaded in the back room there, they had negotiations. And finally, I think it was \$47,000 is what they paid to the longshoremen whose patriotic committees were heard.

[00:21:56] **HOWARD:** So, it was blackmailed.

[00:21:59] **GEORGE:** So, you see how communism was used? This was a very clear cut of the brain case. They came before the hearing and spoke! Then for example, Ryan himself, while he was on the stand, he was asked, how come he was—he had a special fund, a certain, secret fund in his bedroom. Not even in the bank, this was cash money. And he was spending a terrific amount of money for all sorts of very expensive suits and so on. So he was questioned on that. 'What is this fund that you have? This special fund?' Because employers were getting into this fund! And when it came to Christmas or a period like that, they'd take \$5,000 from this fund, \$2,000 from that—depending on how big these various companies were. And he said that it was an anti-communist fund. This was a special fund for fighting communism. That was his alibi and that was all he—and he just stuck to it and had nothing to do with it.

So that's what I'm trying to tell you. This surface aura of being the moral, anti-communism didn't mean a goddamn thing. He was charged of being a racketeer and this whole—and of there were murders on the docks there, periodically. And there was no secret about the whole thing. In fact, he came to this special hearing. So they wouldn't give a goddamn to him, because they depend on the workers being concerned primarily with the bread-and-butter questions.

[00:23:44] **HOWARD:** And I guess the question that I have is why it never seemed to be delivering on the bread-and-butter questions? As you say, you'd go and discuss things in the back room and—

[00:23:53] **GEORGE:** I'm telling you, he did not do it. He did not deliver. If he delivered anything on—if he appeared to be delivering anything, it was only because—

[00:24:00] **HOWARD:** He was forced to?

[00:24:00] **GEORGE:** He had no recourse. It was the ship owners who were delivering in response to the rank-and-file movement, and then very often.

[00:24:10] **HOWARD:** So how does a guy like that stay around the labor movement? He can't stay around at the basis of an anti-communism alone.

[00:24:16] **GEORGE:** Well see look, you take a look at the AFL [American Federation of Labor] executive council right now. The AFL-CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] . One of the members on there is a guy by the name of Angelo Fosco.

[00:24:24] **HOWARD:** I know him. Laborers Union [Laborers International Union of North America] , right?

[00:24:25] **GEORGE:** Yeah, he's the head of the Laborers Union. And that union is just racket-ridden in the worst way.

[00:24:31] **HOWARD:** I know. I was in it for a while.

[00:24:35] **GEORGE:** It's run like a dictatorship, much like a Teamsters Union and much like the longshoremen. And right now there's a developing investigating the union too. And this guy is just plain, out and out racketeer! And he's clearly—he's also—by the way, there's Mother Jones magazine has another post on—

[00:24:54] **HOWARD:** Yeah, I read it.

[00:24:55] **GEORGE:** So he's on the—[pause]

[00:25:03] **HOWARD:** I can explain that. My explanation is that I was a rank-and-file laborer and we never had a chance to vote for his office on anything.

[00:25:09] **GEORGE:** No! There's no voting there.

[00:25:10] **HOWARD:** So, maybe there's—

[00:25:11] **GEORGE:** Maybe there's some locals that have their own democratic procedures, depends on if they have some autonomous rights. So they use it. But generally speaking, as far as the national office is concerned, they won't come down on a local because the local is involved in racketeering because they themselves are directly involved.

[00:25:28] **HOWARD:** So it's possible that the rank-and-file longshoremen probably never voted for Ryan in the first place. He was appointed to his position, perhaps—I'll have to look it up in the history, but I—

[00:25:36] **GEORGE:** It's a long story. For a period, Ryan was the President of New York Central Labor Council!

And he—see you got to remember that there was period when most of the building trade unions were racket-ridden in the worst way. And so racketeering was not considered in the AFL—the old AFL. It was not considered a crime. In fact, it was almost considered a foregone conclusion that if an estimate was given for a building construction operation, you got to add 10 percent for racketeering. That was sort of accepted. And so you got to take that into account.

Now you take the case of only the ILWU. The ILWU grew out of a struggle against ILA racketeering. But basically, as far as the longshoremen on the West Coast are concerned, they were under a blue book union, which was a company union. It was the period in '33, '34. Early '34. When the early stage of the New Deal provided for Section 7A of the old National—NRA [National Recovery Administration] of the blue book union. And the union was the outcome of the period when a lot of employers, rushed into build unions, under the idea of that well now the New Deal provides for new unions, so we'll build unions. They were building unions using stooges, building company unions. And what you got was a tremendous rise of company unions, and one of them was the Blue Book Union. And it was operated in the same way as what the longshoremen call the shape-up. The main issue among the longshoremen was the hiring hall. The hall where people would be listed and in rotation and they'd be justice for people, and as far as jobs were concerned, that was the main thing.

I remember I was in the West Coast at the time, I was the editor of the Western Worker at that time, and I was very much involved, back when the big strike took place, I was editing [?books?] they put out. Well, maybe it was 3,000 longshoremen, probably, early in the morning along the Embarcadero [San Francisco waterfront]. And maybe five were actually hired. But it was all the basis of the foreman picking their favorites! Same way as in the East Coast, and with that was the various kinds of favors to the foreman. A guy would paint his house and that kind of stuff.

So that was such a hot issue that to a large extent, this group of people that Harry Bridges led, the rank-and-file group, were just a few rank-and-filers. In fact, they used to come to my office, use our mimeograph machine to put out their bulletins on the waterfront board. And they developed into quite a movement, on the basis of liquidating the Blue Book Union and starting a real union. And the ILA was the union! Because the AFL was union that AFL—the AFL developed at that time. And it was only a question of getting a charter. And they had a charter, there were a number of officials, but they were meaningless, because they were merely holding their jobs in the paper local, and that's what it was, a paper union. The Blue Book Union, the company was the real union, so to speak. It was just merely—and people who didn't have a blue book couldn't get a job. In other words, the foreman had to make sure that guy had a blue book in order to pick them.

[END PART ONE/BEGIN PART TWO]

That was a real key issue that moved these people. And there it was a good example, it showed the rank-and-file that clearly recognizes the key issue that affects the workers can grow and turn into a big movement.

[00:30:10] **HOWARD:** Let me about some of these earlier questions, too, about before the 1934 strike in the West Coast, and actually what I'm look at is the twenties, and it seems to me although I may be wrong that a number of radical groups were more successful in the West Coast among the longshoremen—I'm thinking of the Wobblies and also the Communist Party—than on the East Coast. Do you have any sense for why that may have been the case?

[00:30:31] **GEORGE:** First of all, there were no Wobblies on the West Coast, in the twenties, anymore. The Wobblies were practically dead by the early-twenties.

[00:30:39] **HOWARD:** What about this Marine Transportation Workers Industrial Union down in—

[00:30:42] **GEORGE:** No. Well, that was absolutely dead. There was the—the only thing that you'll have in the twenties, was the TUEL, the Trade Union Education League Union. Not the Marine Workers Industrial Union. And this union, this was mostly a rank-and-file movement within the TUEL and it had groups of workers on ships. Its activity consisted of mainly of organizing rank-and-file struggles on one or another issue. It may have fact I'm certain on shipboard or a port, but no big development took place in the twenties. It was not until the early thirties that the Marine Workers Industrial Union began to develop a significant movement. And it was the Marine Workers Industrial Union that provided the key people, early people who eventually led the National Maritime Union and the ILWU on the West Coast.

[00:31:45] **HOWARD:** Okay, why was—it seems there was also a split within the sailor's unions from what I know, the sailor's union in the Pacific went to the right and the National Maritime Movement went to left.

[00:31:53] **GEORGE:** Well the sailor's union had no guts, there was nothing in it. Well you see, what happened is this, it's the—when the ILWU finally called the strike in March of 1934, and the longshoremen came on. The longshoremen became the base, first of all, it was the San Francisco local, it was the key one, and it was the local—so to speak, led the whole coast. I went to San Francisco local than all the other locals along the coast.

[00:32:23] **HOWARD:** Was it the most militant in your view? Or not necessarily, because I read about them. And you know in Seattle? They seemed very militant up there as well.

[00:32:30] **GEORGE:** Yeah, I know but it was the largest.

[00:32:31] **HOWARD:** It was the largest, okay.

[00:32:31] **GEORGE:** It was among the largest at that time and the best organized. So whatever San Francisco did—see, it became the keystone. Whatever San Francisco did it was followed by the others, in other words, when San Francisco called a strike, the others automatically followed them and it became a coast wide strike. So it started as a longshoremen strike, but when the longshoremen stopped, the sailors couldn't do anything. So every time a ship came in, the men would discharge and they were on the waterfront. Same way with tug people and so on. The Inland Boatmen [Inland Boatmen's Union of the Pacific]. So what you had there is the organization or renewal so to speak of the sailor's union, which was nothing but a paper union at the time. You had its renewal by virtue of the fact that the longshoremen were out, and so with the Marine Workers Industrial Union people and longshoremen and several people here and there, the old sailor's union that were halfway decent, you had a renovation of the sailor's union in the Pacific. And that's how Lundeberg got a union. He had no union to speak of before. But then of course, in the early stages Lundeberg was playing a radical role too.

But then there was a subsequent development, well then, you see, as a result of that strike, you had the creation of the Pacific Coast Conference—Council, which included a membership of all the maritime unions. The sailor's union of the Pacific, the ILWU, the Inland Boatmen's Union, the various dock mechanics who were involved in the department, scalers those who cleaned. . . , and so they were all a part of that conference of some 35,000 members. And the ILWU was the initial union that gave impetus to this united movement of all the maritime workers. But then within that union, they were developing the struggle, largely influenced by the ship owners, and the government—tried to break it up. And they were quite successful in getting—developing a tension between Bridges and Lundeberg.

[00:34:58] **HOWARD:** Is the Pacific Maritime Federation that you're talking about then? Okay, that's the councilmen that you're talking about.

[00:35:04] **GEORGE:** Thirty-five thousand.

[00:35:05] **HOWARD:** What about the East Coast now? The Marine Workers Industrial Union made a lot of inroads in the west, how did they do the east?

[00:35:11] **GEORGE:** Well, in the East, it was movement first of all, rank-and-file people in various ships, so it's various [pause] jobs for them, which were perhaps limited ship for the dock. Sometimes a job questions—also the question of fights within the hiring hall to justice of hiring and that sort of thing. But then you take Joe Curran. He was a member of the Marine Workers Industrial Union.

[00:35:54] **HOWARD:** Was he?

[00:35:55] **GEORGE:** Sure, sure.

[00:35:56] **HOWARD:** I didn't know that.

[00:35:57] **GEORGE:** Sure, he was a—in fact, in the early stages, he was like a communist! He wasn't a communist that I remember, but he was much like a communist.

[00:36:10] **HOWARD:** Why did he turn himself so violently?

[00:36:11] **GEORGE:** Well—

[00:36:14] **HOWARD:** He and Mike Quill said the same thing, right?

[00:36:16] **GEORGE:** Well Mike Quill was in later date, that was in '48. See in the case of Joe Curran, that started earlier. That was an internal struggle in many ways.

[00:36:25] **HOWARD:** He was close to the party, though? He was close to the party in your estimation? During an earlier period?

[00:36:31] **GEORGE:** Very early period, sure.

[00:36:33] **HOWARD:** What time you're talking about—?

[00:36:34] **GEORGE:** The main thing that started was the—again, the tension between him and with Bridges. See, Bridges was the obvious leader of the maritime setup, this maritime setup was in a national scale within the old CIO at that time, and you had tensions over the question of leadership, and the enemy made use of that.

[00:37:01] **HOWARD:** Is that a way for communism to be active?

[00:37:02] **GEORGE:** That's right, that's right. You had that. In this case, he was not a party person, but the fact that he was so [pause] raw in the leadership at the Al Lannon—who was the communist for the maritime union, he was the most active—he's dead now. Al Lannon used to tell how, when Joe had his first strike on the ship and became hero because that was the thing that sparked the further development of the NMU [National Maritime Union] and a lot of newsmen came down and interviewed him and so forth. So this was in the very heart of the CIO period, so any little thing that happened became big news because the potential was so tremendous. Most of anything that developed, started with almost nothing in those days. So Al Lannon had to write out on cardboard, in large letters so that he [Joe Curran] could look at that, as the photographer had him, and interviewed him. [laughs] He couldn't—Joe Curran became a very prolific speaker later. But at that time, he was

completely raw and Al Lannon in fact had to coach him and everything that's what the issue was. Well he eventually developed into a racketeer. As a matter of fact, recently—

[00:38:40] **HOWARD:** That was before—that was the after his split though—it seemed to me—

[00:38:42] **GEORGE:** Oh, it was years later. See again, it was a question—during the Cold War. The development of the Cold War, and some of this, in the case of Joe, his tensions with Bridges developed before the Cold War.

[00:38:56] **HOWARD:** And those were basically personal or political differences? Or a little bit of both?

[00:39:00] **GEORGE:** Well, it was a question of who was the leader in the maritime setup. And the NMU was growing great guns. It was going on the basis of the law, grew from some 120 odd members to 120,000 members during the war. But you know a lot of the—and the NMU suddenly became a big union and he felt himself the Big Cheese. Well, the fact of the matter is, the NMU now has less than 30,000 members.

[00:39:31] **HOWARD:** Is that right?

[00:39:31] **GEORGE:** And Joe was getting \$100,000 towards the end, he was getting 90-odd thousand dollars a year by the end in wages.

[00:39:44] **HOWARD:** He's dead now?

[00:39:45] **GEORGE:** That's right. Out of a union of less than 30,000 members. And there was so much racketeering involved there that recently, a judge ruled that Joe and the present president who seceded him, and several others who took illegal money out of the union [have] got to repay it. It was—the case was stretching for a long time too, took weeks and weeks.

[00:40:12] **HOWARD:** I know he built a Joe Curran Maritime Memorial or something like that—it was a huge palace to himself?

[00:40:17] **GEORGE:** Oh well that's—they built a hall—they called it the Joe Curran Hall, the biggest legacy you could make. That's the kind of person that he was. You could see a lot of that kind of thing played a part. Many of these people, in that period, the communist movement was growing and the communists were very active in building many of the unions that grew up and they had close cooperation with John L. Lewis and his people. So it became an advantage to be with the communists for many people who wanted to grow up in the labor movement. You know some people who were real honest rank-and-filers, like Bridges. But the others were just phonies who just wanted to advantage. And Curran was just one case like that. There were a quite number of others. It was an advantage to be known as a communist.

[00:41:19] **HOWARD:** But he was on the left politically that was sincere?

[00:41:21] **GEORGE:** Oh yeah, sure. He was. He was. And then he went to the extreme right. As a matter fact, he was such a phony that long after he went to the extreme right, he organized a delegation to go to the Soviet Union, and he came back and wrote a pamphlet. It was the most glorious pamphlet that you could write about how good everything is in the Soviet Union.

[00:41:42] **HOWARD:** When did that come out? Do you have any idea?

[00:41:43] **GEORGE:** Oh, that was in the later stages, long after the Cold War. The Cold War was already cooling off to some extent. And you see, he was not consistent at all. He was just a racketeer. That's the difference.

On the case of Bridges, Bridges held to his position to this very day, he never veered from his position and he never attacked the Soviet Union, he has taken the position that he very often visits the Soviet Union. So four years as the president he has never veered from the basic policy. Now, there are people who are attacking him, who have attacked him including lefts attacking him, on the ground that he signed what they call the—

[00:42:47] **HOWARD:** Mechanization agreement?

[00:42:48] **GEORGE:** Yeah, the mechanization—

[00:42:48] **HOWARD:** Modernization and Mechanization.

[00:42:49] **GEORGE:** And at that time I remember talking to him about it when he signed the agreement and he was explaining about the situation was, the fact is he was recognized earlier than others that this technological development is taking place! Containerization! When they weren't even thinking about it in the east coast. But now containers—no shipping takes place without containers, nowadays. And all the mechanics involved in handling containerization that's as new as you can imagine in other industries. It's a revolution in the maritime industry.

Well he saw it in advance and what he did is he signed the agreement whereby the people who were displaced would get adequate compensation. And to that time, especially the type of compensation that they agreed on, made it quite safe for a guy to be displaced. He'd be assured, practically in the not only in the lump sum amount, but also, very substantial payment. Annually. In addition to social security and whatever else. So what you have is some people demagogically—and that includes some left—demagogically tried to pin on him some of the responsibility for the changes that are taking place and with that they also tried to pin on him the fact that there was—see with the growing number of Black people in San Francisco was another siege. There was a large number who wanted to get into this field because it was one of the highest paying fields in the country. In wages. And you just couldn't just open the door wide, everybody come in. So you have to have some controls. They had the classification: first, second, and third. And those who were in the subsidiary group—

[00:45:09] **HOWARD:** B-men?

[00:45:10] **GEORGE:** Yeah, they were—a large percentage of them were Black. So this was demagogic efforts to pin the chauvinism against him on the ground that you had that kind of situation. But you had that, you had that. Now, eventually, under his leadership, they broke into this declassification to give a—to have a considerable allowance of Blacks to come in. And as a matter a fact, the local today, Local 10 in San Francisco is a majority Black. But that's due to a natural development taking place all over the country!

[00:45:52] **HOWARD:** I know places like Portland, though, there's been a great deal of questions about Bridges' role there. He did intervene very early in efforts to integrate that local. It's almost all white today, it was the ship owners that I understand, who pushed to integrate the local. And Bridges wasn't going to take a role in that.

[00:46:07] **GEORGE:** Well, of course he didn't. You see, the point is though, you had to—now people, they softened up on this kind of criticism because you take a look at many fields where, let's say transport workers in New York, I remember a time when you couldn't see a Black man in there among the 35,000 workers. They manned the whole kinds of systems in the city. Now, a majority, or nearly a majority are Black. Well, that's due

to another development. The point is that the—on the major thing, and that's the [inaudible] agreement, Harry foresaw a development that was unescapable, and he took the bull by the horn. That's what it is.

[00:47:02] **HOWARD:** That makes sense. Let me ask you before we leave this question, the Marine Workers Industrial Union was fairly strong among all crafts on the West Coast and you seem to indicate that it was strong among the East Coast among sailors—

[00:47:14] **GEORGE:** I didn't say it was—

[00:47:14] **HOWARD:** I mean, among the maritime occupations.

[00:47:18] **GEORGE:** The Marine Workers Industrial Union, was largely the organization through which the cadre, the leading force, the dynamic people came. When the mass movement flowered out, so you had a situation—long through the twenties and several years in the thirties after I would say, after '34, the Marine Workers Industrial Union was not much more than skeleton workers. They did not have big, mass space. Not an organized mass, right. There was a lot of people, a lot of seamen, a lot of longshoremen who were with them, but it was not organized because the situation had not yet reached a point where you can legally organize, and at the same time, challenge the unions that were chartered but were paper unions. There was an ILA in the West Coast, but it was nothing but a paper organization, it was a charter. There was a seamen's union, the SIU on the East Coast. It was nothing but a paper organization. What's his name, old Andy Furuseth that was technically behind the—nothing behind it! So the NMU, the Marine Workers Industrial Union continually had published material and continually attacked the reactionary leadership in the various maritime unions--

[00:49:03] **HOWARD:** Was it a dual union? Was it a dual union then, *per se*? Or was it just sort of something that existed around the periphery.

[00:49:09] **GEORGE:** No, no it wasn't a dual union. Yes. Because the other—you see, what—the—strictly speaking, the dual union is not the right term. If it's dual—let's say they have a mass movement that divides the workers. But it did not. It had a rank-and-file movement that fought within the existing organization or attempted to organize within an existing organization didn't exist. So it's not dual—

[00:49:34] **HOWARD:** Almost parallel, then or something or—

[00:49:36] **GEORGE:** No, no. It's not. It's—it was a rank-and-file movement that worked within the existing labor movement.

[00:49:42] **HOWARD:** Okay, within the existing labor movements as well—?

[00:49:44] **GEORGE:** See, bear in mind this, as far as the communist position is concerned, or the left position in general, there was the time when the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World] system, the idea that the old labor movement was an obstacle and got to be destroyed and build a new one. It was Lenin, who in 1921, wrote a pamphlet called, *Left Communism* [“Left-Wing” Communism: An Infantile Disorder], in which he sharply attacked all the various tendencies in the United States, France, and Germany, where the idea was to ignore the existing unions and try to draw out the progressives into a separate union to build a new movement. And he said ‘what you're doing is isolating the people from the mass workers, you're doing a favor to the reactionary leaders, who are only happy to get rid of you.’ You know, to have an easy saying with their membership and he says ‘the role of the communist must be of building within the mass movement that exists.’

Now, that would be—let's say suppose you try to build a new union. Let's say the steelworkers did that. That would be a complete violation of the communist policy. The position of communist is to work within the

existing mass union. That is union to have a substantial place in order to develop a progressive policy within those unions. Through fighting against reactionary leaders, to supporting progressives, for introducing measures that will the union of a higher level, and to develop mass struggles, to give progressive leadership in every form possible.

[00:51:38] **HOWARD:** That's more of what I'd call a caucus then, almost.

[00:51:42] **GEORGE:** Well, in some cases it could be done through a caucus, in some case it's done in an open organization. It depends, it depends on what the circumstances are. For example, you take the Teamsters, right now, there's a big opposition to the Teamsters Union and they have an office established in Detroit and they operate, they put out a publication and the people are open to—it's like a separate organization. They're working within the Teamster's organization against the—

[00:52:10] **HOWARD:** Right, and that's essentially how the Marine Workers work?

[00:52:13] **GEORGE:** Well, the Marine Workers Industrial Union had an open office, but many of its members had to have in mind that on the one hand the ship owners. And the ship owner would guide the member of the machine worker—the marine worker's union and would never hire them. Secondly, you had these paper local officials who would get the money as officials, but who didn't have union, but they very often acted like stooges. They very often point out people, the ship owners whom they shouldn't hire. That was a very common thing. So that was the problem.

[00:52:56] **HOWARD:** So it really wasn't a dual union, in the sense that the Wobblies, they instituted something else—

[00:53:01] **GEORGE:** No, it would be dual union where you try to build a rival union. See, that's dual unionism. But the principles of the old TUEL, Trade Union Education League, and later on it developed into the TUUL, Trade Union Unity League, was to build a new union only where the old union is ineffective completely and doesn't exist, or it's a paper organization. There were really no rivals.

Secondly, to have parallel with building unions was possible, rank-and-file movements within the existing unions. There was some mistakes too. There were some cases where some people were very anxious to build themselves a little union, and they'd violate this kind of a rule. And it'd be a very stupid thing to do. But some people say, "Well, I'll build myself a union of 500 people. It's alright, it would be enough to pay my wages and that's it." Disregarding completely the fact that within that same industry, there's a big union that's in existence and it'd be more progressive to work within.

[00:54:08] **HOWARD:** What about on the East Coast, were the Marine Workers Industrial Union successful at all in radicalizing the ILA? Apparently not, but did they make any efforts in coming into the ILA and pushing membership to the left?

[00:54:20] **GEORGE:** Well, in a very limited sense, yes. First of all, by the fact that you had a rank-and-file movement that was underground—that's true—which encouraged also, some people who were able to work openly. There was one local for example, one notable local that's 1097? I think. Or it was 997. It was the central local on the Manhattan docks and that local was somewhat more decent you might say, than some of the others. It was more influenced by a number of people, especially the leader, I don't recall his name, who was a fairly decent guy. And very often, this rank-and-file movement that we had, sort of channeled its public action through the people in that local. But that's one of those exceptions. That local for a long time held out, in time, I think it changed there, I don't see much difference now—but you see, most of these locals went out of business, because

the docks moved to Brooklyn. And this was one of them, this is one of the largest local on the West Coast—West Side in Manhattan, and it just petered out. When—like the rest of them and it was—but during a certain period, it did play a more—relatively progressive role. And I say relatively.

[00:56:02] **HOWARD:** Not as much as in the West though?

[00:56:03] **GEORGE:** Purely in the sense that it was more considerate to some of the conditions of the rank-and-file and found itself in opposition to Joe Ryan. In that sense, you see. Don't forget that at any time the racketeers had struggles among themselves too. And progressives sometimes utilized one against another as much as possible. If it meant one or another form of raising the level of the rank-and-file movement.

[00:56:36] **HOWARD:** Generally, though, it might be a generalization, but would it be safe to say that the Marine Workers Industrial was much more successful in the West Coast during the early thirties, than on the East Coast?

[00:56:46] **GEORGE:** Oh yes sure—I mean it was successful in the East Coast in the sense that it founded the—

[00:56:52] **HOWARD:** NMU.

[00:56:52] **GEORGE:** Probably the NMU.

[00:56:53] **HOWARD:** But not among the longshoremen, as much, right?

[00:56:56] **GEORGE:** No, among the longshoremen, it was only—it was a different situation.

[00:57:00] **HOWARD:** Okay, alright let's see, we covered a lot of ground here. One of the things that intrigues me about the East Coast versus the West Coast, comparing the longshore labor itself, is there seem to be a lot of ethnic differences on the East Coast. You have the Italians in one area, you have the Irish in another, you have the German and Scots in another. On the West Coast it seems more homogeneous.

[00:57:22] **GEORGE:** That's true.

[00:57:22] **HOWARD:** Was—how much of a factor was that in keeping the rank-and-file together and having them as a base of opposition to Ryan. I mean if they were split up—

[00:57:30] **GEORGE:** That's right, that's a factor. You have the Italian dock and you have—as a matter of fact, they were very often, this is a Swedish dock they told me, they were very often owned by the nationality. And that was one of the factors too that the racketeers encouraged because it sort of helped the gel of the group around. So it was on a national basis, on a privileged basis and other classifying something.

[00:57:59] **HOWARD:** Do you notice any different—?

[00:57:59] **GEORGE:** And the East Coast by the way, on the West Coast rather, the tensions began to develop at a later stage when a large number of Blacks and Chicanos came into work.

[00:58:10] **HOWARD:** What, was that after World War II?

[00:58:11] **GEORGE:** Well, that came later. That came later. Well you see, sure—even before World War II. No, mostly after World War II. Yeah, mostly after. You see a large number of Blacks then the issue began to develop along that line, you see.

[00:58:27] **HOWARD:** Along what specifically? Do you remember?

[00:58:29] **GEORGE:** No, but that was natural because Blacks and Chicanos were coming in and the population too, coming into the industry. And that's what you have in all industries now. To some extent. Of course with that comes also the various group lines that are influenced to some extent by your race-relations or nationality.

[00:58:55] **HOWARD:** Were there actual locals that positions? Like race positions? On the West Coast?

[00:58:59] **GEORGE:** No, no this is—this is—the only thing that you had, like the struggle on the [inaudible] question. That kind of stuff, for both Chicanos and Blacks. You see, that sort of thing.

[00:59:11] **HOWARD:** Another difference it seems to me on the East and the West Coast was the employers' position. It may have been a reflection of the unions, but on the West Coast of course the employers were very militant, they were organized in an employer's association and they resisted very fiercely. On the East Coast, the employers were much more collaborative and were on to sign sweetheart agreements [between employer and union official, favorable to the employer and without membership approval].

[00:59:28] **GEORGE:** Hold on a sec, they had an association on both.

[00:59:30] **HOWARD:** Did they?

[00:59:31] **GEORGE:** Sure.

[00:59:31] **HOWARD:** Did they have one in the thirties? Do you know?

[00:59:33] **GEORGE:** Of course they did. Of course they did. The Shipping Association was the—oh, they worked their heads off. They started from in tomorrow morning to break the strike to influence the Rossi Administration—Mayor Angelo Rossi [mayor of San Francisco, 1931-1944] at that time. And they were the main force behind the vigilantes who were organized to smash—to raze all the unions. Developed a period almost like fascism.

[01:00:10] **HOWARD:** What period was that? What time period?

[01:00:12] **GEORGE:** That was during the strike! General strike. See the effort to break the general strike—well during—it was right after the general strike. The general strike was on the fifteenth, lasted four days—five days. And as a counteract—

[END PART TWO/BEGIN PART THREE]

[01:00:33] **HOWARD:** Okay, let me kind of wind this thing up here, I know you must be getting tired. Okay, let me ask you a few questions, if I can, about Bridges. You already indicated some of your general impressions of him, one the things that I've been focusing on is the fact that Bridges may have been able to retain his position as long as he did was because he was integrated so well with the rank-and-file before he became a union officer. He spent something like 16 years on the waterfront, the workers developed a sense of trust and support and among the few radical unions, Curran probably did the same thing, from my understanding as a rank-and-file

worker for several years and then got into a position of respect. And once—I think my argument would be, once you're that integrated with the rank-and-file, you have those deep roots, if you're in a position of power, you're not going to be displaced very easily.

[01:01:18] **GEORGE:** Well he came in as a rank-and-file. And he had built the union on the basis of a rank-and-file union. I don't know any union in the country that's been more sensitive to the rank-and-file influence in this union.

[CUT OFF DUE TO PHONE RINGING]

Leadership was not only so sensitive and so closely related to the rank-and-file and living with the rank-and-file. Now, one of the characteristics of a lot of unions in this country, even those that rose up in upsurge in the thirties in a progressive upsurge, is that once the union becomes established, becomes a big union, treasuries grow, they become heavily salaried over that, they become bureaucratic. So that's the big problem that you got. A large number of people rose up with the upsurge in the thirties, became extremely bureaucratic when their union grew into half a million or more.

[01:02:35] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you about a few unions that I know in particular, do you happen to know people offhand—I'm thinking of the leadership of UE [United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America], was [James J.] Matles, [Julius] Embspak, and [Albert J.] Fitzgerald.

[01:02:44] **GEORGE:** I knew them very well, I covered practically all of the UE conventions.

[01:02:48] **HOWARD:** How long were they rank-and-file workers?

[01:02:51] **GEORGE:** [inaudible].

[01:02:51] **HOWARD:** Oh, is that right? Who's the president of that union now?

[01:02:55] **GEORGE:** Well they got entirely new—they all died. The president who retired recently, Fitzgerald. Albert Fitzgerald, he's—he was a progressive right-group. But he—what you may call a—he comes from a conservative union. But in a relevant sense, he was progressive in a sense that he—you might call him moderate. But he never, in all the years, since '22 when he became president, he only retired just two years ago.

He has always stuck very closely to the union's progressive history and position, and very often he would get into a struggle with certain people and ex-communists, like Matles, over issues where he took more progressive position.

[01:03:53] **HOWARD:** Is that right?

[01:03:54] **GEORGE:** That's right.

[01:03:56] **HOWARD:** How long, do you know, were those people were rank-and-file workers?

[01:04:00] **GEORGE:** I don't know the people who are non-leadership.

[01:04:01] **HOWARD:** I'm thinking more of—

[01:04:02] **GEORGE:** I expect I'll be meeting them when they come down here to convention next Monday at the Biltmore Hotel. UE National Convention.

[01:04:08] **HOWARD:** The UE National Convention is going to be down here?

[01:04:09] **GEORGE:** So, if you want to look at the union, go up there.

[01:04:13] **HOWARD:** How about those three in particular though? Matles, Emfspak, and Fitzgerald. Do you know how long they spent as rank-and-file workers before sitting in as union workers?

[01:04:21] **GEORGE:** Oh sure, Frank Matles was head of the OTEO Union.

[01:04:24] **HOWARD:** Machinists, right? Or metalworkers?

[01:04:26] **GEORGE:** Machinists and various other things. Emfspak was in the Schenectady [New York] electrical workers.

[01:04:39] **HOWARD:** Do you know how long they spent on the shop floor?

[01:04:41] **GEORGE:** Oh yeah, they were in the shop.

[01:04:44] **HOWARD:** Do you remember what length of time that he spent on the shop?

[01:04:48] **GEORGE:** Well, I don't remember what it was or the history of it, but it was not very long because he was quite a young man and became secretary of the union. He became secretary treasurer of the union when it was founded. Jim Carey was the president, first presidents now. Jim Carey came from a Philadelphia local. And Jim was kind of a—well, he had his foundations in the Young People's Socialist League.

[01:05:19] **HOWARD:** Oh is that right?

[01:05:20] **GEORGE:** And he—but he was also in Catholic version, Catholic that is he was decent—organizationally that he was Catholic. How much religious morality there was, I can't tell. He became an extreme reactionary. But he was president for a period, for several years he was president and he was progressive. No question about it. He had a progressive role within the early stages.

Matles was a communist for a number of years and he became bureaucratic towards the end of his time. He was, you might say a moderate reactionary.

But Emfspak, he probably had the best record as a progressive and a communist. And then of course, Fitzgerald was—he came from a conservative local up in Lynn, Mass [Massachusetts], a big general electric company, he was president of that local. That local was very conservative, but notwithstanding that, he has won the presidency with the contest with Carey and he pushed Carey out and has consistently been progressive through all the years. For all the years. Not a communist, but he had always defended the right of people to be communist in the union. He did not find fault in anybody who believed in communism, but he himself, as far as his position—and he's religious. Catholic.

[01:07:12] **HOWARD:** What about—let me ask you that because I know both the East and West Coast longshore locals have composed largely of Catholic membership and so on, some of the estimates are 80 or 90 percent are Catholics or were during the thirties—

[01:07:22] **GEORGE:** East, East Coast.

[01:07:22] **HOWARD:** And West too.

[01:07:23] **GEORGE:** Well West you got a different kind of Catholic. You get like Chicano Catholic.

[01:07:38] **HOWARD:** Oh, is that right?

[01:07:38] **GEORGE:** Sure. Otherwise, you don't have a solid Catholic mass there in [?whites?] like you had in the East. East you had a lot of Irish. Irish were a big factor and it impacted [?antagonism?]. And you see, there was a difference between Irish Catholic and Italian Catholic also. The Italian Catholic they separated the church from their personal affairs. The Irish Catholics, they use their Catholicism as a caucus so to speak.

[01:08:04] **HOWARD:** I suppose the Catholic religion would make them more receptive to anti-communism, too?

[01:08:10] **GEORGE:** Well, not that, in some places there were times that Jews did the same thing too. Like in the [inaudible] working union and clothing workers, they used their Jewishness as a caucus.

[01:08:24] **HOWARD:** But the tenets of Catholicism, as I understand it, strongly—

[01:08:27] **GEORGE:** Well, some people, and you can stretch that but—

[01:08:30] **HOWARD:** You think that's been stretched too much? I just want to get as much of a factor in explaining differences.

[01:08:35] **GEORGE:** Well, there's a big difference, Catholics in Poland and Catholics in Italy. World of a difference.

[01:08:39] **HOWARD:** Yeah, I suppose that true. Some Catholics are—you take in Ireland now. In Ireland, through the centuries of nationalism, national struggle against British rule, it was very closely integrated in the Catholic Church. So the Catholic Church became sort of the cement for the Irish in their struggle as a nation, and in other places, you don't have that.

[01:09:07] **GEORGE:** Let's say in France. The majority of the French are Catholic, but the religion has very little to do with the foundation of it. French struggle from the revolution and on. So it's a question on what the Catholic Church and in what matter the Catholic Church played a role. Same with Poland. The Catholic Church there has been kind of the cement for the Polish nationalism, for the years that in various parts it was, Poland today were either on the Germany, under those Tsarist Russia or Hungarian Empire. And it was associated with the nationalist role to some extent. So you can't just go by the tenets of the Catholic religion here, as a—

[01:10:04] **HOWARD:** Okay, let's move on to the Second World War if we can, briefly discuss that period. In your world, a number of people raised criticism on the party's position on the war, and pushing the national unity program to the exclusion of any concern almost for all trade union affairs. First of all, let me get your reaction to the criticism, do you think it's justifiable? If it was, were there alternatives open to the people on the left or not?

[01:10:29] **GEORGE:** No one can take issue with the policy of national good union against fascism. That was the key thing, and in that respect, there is no one that seriously take issue with that policy.

[01:10:46] **HOWARD:** On the principle—

[01:10:46] **GEORGE:** The consequence of that [pause] had been—you had to take a certain amount of evil with it because you're making unity with capitalism. Since you're having a front with the capitalist class against

fascism, you couldn't differentiate too much. Of course we had—we were struggling. We were used to raise hell about the capitalists sabotaging in the interest of profits. More dynamic efforts against Hitler and so forth. So we had a sharp of criticism. So it was all within the framework of unity, national unity against fascism, and it had, in a matter of fact, a weakening of the class struggle. No question about it.

[01:11:36] **HOWARD:** And weakening the party's influence—weakening the party's influence after the war.

[01:11:40] **GEORGE:** Among certain workers, yes. Among certain workers. And also the fact that the—and this was the worst thing—this is that certain part of the leadership of the party grew the conclusion that we'll have this united front, after the war. That was [Earl] Browder's reasoning. And that's where the weakening came in. Weakening took the starch out of the party, for the rank-and-file, took the dynamics out of it. And it was a problem. You couldn't just reword this all over night. It's a problem of getting out of that. We lost a lot of membership who seriously believed in Browder! They left the party, left leadership. It was quite a change. And of course, as a result of that the party had suffered. Then on top of that came the Cold War. And that's one of the reasons why the party has lost a whole generation of members. We missed a generation. It was only in the recent years that we're coming back, to new people coming in. For up until, for a whole generation, we only lost people.

[01:12:52] **HOWARD:** What about the generation of workers who were in plants in the forties during the war? For instance, I know UAW [United Automobile Workers] and UE, where the left-leadership pushed things like working center plans, speed-ups, and things like that. They had to alienate a lot of rank-and-file workers—

[01:13:06] **GEORGE:** Well, those things existed. But you see, during the war, we weren't pushing speed-up too much.

[01:13:12] **HOWARD:** Well the UE was, weren't they?

[01:13:13] **GEORGE:** No, no. Look, on the contrary, on the contrary, the UE was one of the most active unions in pressing for all out production to beat Hitler.

[01:13:26] **HOWARD:** Do you mean speedup on the workers?

[01:13:28] **GEORGE:** That's right! That's right.

[01:13:29] **HOWARD:** Speed them up.

[01:13:29] **GEORGE:** Yeah. Because the UE was to a large extent influenced in by the party's position, which—the main emphasis on beating fascism. So, that's not the case. Don't let anybody tell you otherwise.

[01:13:44] **HOWARD:** Okay. I mean, it's just the problem—I can understand in principle why you would want to make that the primary influence—beating fascism. But if it comes down to the workers aspect, of course [inaudible] [talking one over another].

[01:13:55] **GEORGE:** Looking back, you can say, 'Well, if we had done it all over again, we might have done it different.'

[01:13:59] **HOWARD:** That's the question, I'm asking you that. Would you?

[01:14:04] **GEORGE:** You got to take each situation by itself. First of all, you can't conceive of—no situation repeats itself, historically. You can't conceive of this replicating. So it's idle talk. It's idle to figure out, the only

thing you can say is this: that many people looking back will say, Well, we could've done this. Could've done that. But look, the fact is that basically—and you got to be frank about it, see?—but basically that the issue was, you beat the fascism, and had fascism not been defeated, then everything else you did would have turned out to bullshit.

[01:14:46] **HOWARD:** That's true.

[01:14:48] **GEORGE:** So that's the question. You can go ahead and twist around within the framework of the basic position, but you can't escape the basic position of [inaudible].

[01:14:59] **HOWARD:** Okay, I guess the criticism that I would raise, it's not a criticism it's an observation really, is that there was a lot more flexibility within that basic position. Clearly, what had to be done was to beat fascism, but it could have been done with a little more flexibility. At the shop door level.

[01:15:12] **GEORGE:** I know, but look, you're not kidding anybody. You can only talk about a little flexibility, but it wouldn't change the basic situation.

[01:15:21] **HOWARD:** When the party denounced John L. Lewis as a scab and a traitor because he led workers on strike during the war, it's a little hard to sustain that and as far as—

[01:15:29] **GEORGE:** It's hard to question—do you know that The United Mine Workers Journal? Because I had—you look through the old *Daily Worker*, I had loads of copies. The United Mine Workers Journal was full of antisemitism.

[01:15:43] **HOWARD:** During the war?

[01:15:45] **GEORGE:** That's right! During the war. Building up the idea that this was the Jewish capitalists—there was some international combination of Jewish capitalists who were pushing it.

[01:15:56] **HOWARD:** I didn't know that.

[01:15:56] **GEORGE:** Oh yeah. Had editorial, long pages and pages of it, of editorial. It was the craziest stuff you ever had.

[01:16:04] **HOWARD:** Who was behind that? Do you have any idea?

[01:16:06] **GEORGE:** Well, Lewis was part of a committee that included Hoover, the head of—and Matthew Law, and the head of the Sears Roebuck and quite a number of other prominent capitalists, who were advocating that the United States was getting into the war on the side of Germany. Of the United States stay out of the war, rather, and pushed Hitler on the condition that Hitler go east. And that was the—and [?coddlin?] at that time, was one of that combination. In fact, when Pearl Harbor took place, and one of the first things, one of the first acts of the government was to illegalize, [?coddlin?], of course was to illegalize the paper. The last issue that the—oh, what the hell's the name of the paper, Justice was the name of this paper—had a big headline, "Workers Take Direction from John L. Lewis."

[01:17:15] **HOWARD:** Is that right?

[01:17:16] **GEORGE:** That's right and we had reproductions of that.

[01:17:18] **HOWARD:** I'd like to take a look at that.

[01:17:19] **GEORGE:** Oh yeah, absolutely, you look up the—I'll tell you, the UCLA library, they have the full file of the *Daily Worker*, and my quote.

[01:17:34] **HOWARD:** It'd be around Pearl Harbor?

[01:17:35] **GEORGE:** That's right, that's the period. That when Mike Rosen put it on the—and you can look at it. A lot of this stuff.

So look, you had a situation where John L. Lewis was in lead with these people, and he took a position of being against the war! And he influenced some people with the concept that he's for peace. He's keeping the United States out of the war. But his whole line was to ship the war against the Soviet Union, as earlier than when it took place. And during the war, he was sabotaging! In the worst ways. Sabotage. You should see that. Well, you read a lot of literature on it, there's a—

[01:18:27] **HOWARD:** Well, it's sabotaging in the sense that he pulled workers out on strike.

[01:18:30] **GEORGE:** Look Lewis, you had—first of all, Lewis through the twenties and early-thirties, he was the most reactionary labor leader in the country. Then in a sudden switch, he took the position for industrial unionism. And as [?Helinsky?], did you read [?Helinsky's?] —

[01:18:48] **HOWARD:** I read parts of it, yeah.

[01:18:50] **GEORGE:** As he points out, Lewis was looking for allies, looking for people to counter the movement, and he saw that the communists who were active at that time, he sought and welcomed their cooperation. Okay!

Then came the period when he got into a battle with Murray and left the CIO. Well we found ourselves in conflict with him, because we continued the CIO, but we didn't believe in his position when it came to the war.

After the war, came the Taft-Hartley law. And he was opposed to signing the anti-communist affidavit, for his other reasons, not because he was in any way sympathetic to communism. Well, we welcomed him. Sure we welcomed his position, and his struggle within the AFL and he eventually left the AFL, and we welcomed his position.

[01:19:50] **HOWARD:** What about the Taft-Hartley Act? How much of an impact do you think that had in decimating the left-wing in the labor movement?

[01:19:56] **GEORGE:** Well, that's the Cold War! The Taft-Hartley law was one of the key laws within the Cold War designed to isolate the communists from, or the left-wing in general or progressives of even of modern nature, from the mass of the workers.

[01:20:14] **HOWARD:** But if the mass base had been solid that law couldn't have much of an impact. Well, the West Coast longshoremen didn't sign it.

[01:20:22] **GEORGE:** How old are you?

[01:20:23] **HOWARD:** Thirty.

[01:20:24] **GEORGE:** Well, you weren't there.

[01:20:25] **HOWARD:** I was born in 1950.

[01:20:26] **GEORGE:** Well, you weren't there, and I'm telling you, you got to know the atmosphere that existed at that time.

[01:20:31] **HOWARD:** I can get an appreciation—

[01:20:33] **GEORGE:** Fully understand what the situation was.

[01:20:35] **HOWARD:** Three unions had successfully fought that thing and have never signed it.

[01:20:38] **GEORGE:** Look, you got to bear in mind that a union can't possibly survive a day without performing to all the regulations.

[01:20:47] **HOWARD:** Right, I understand that.

[01:20:48] **GEORGE:** And the law. And that is, first of all, the use of the National Labor Relations Board. If you can't process with the labor movement, if you can't have an election to determine bargaining rights and so forth, then you can't live! That's the situation. People might always be screaming about the communists union being under control of the communist governments, well there's no union movement in the world that's more controlled by the government than this union movement, in this United States now. A guy can't get into negotiation nowadays, unless you've got a lawyer in each side then. That's the situation. So don't overlook the fact that when they provided that unless you sign, you are not a communist and you can't run for office, and that the union of which you're an officer, cannot in anyway at all, take issues up with the National Labor Relations Board, either for elections or for grievances or complaints, then you can't be a business.

[01:21:51] **HOWARD:** Okay, but there are three examples that I know—

[01:21:53] **GEORGE:** I know, the miners union [The United Mine Workers of America] . But the miners union had 100 percent control at that time.

[01:22:00] **HOWARD:** And maybe that has to do with—

[01:22:02] **GEORGE:** Oh the miners union would tell the government to go to hell! They did!

[01:22:04] **HOWARD:** Why can they do that? And other unions can't?

[01:22:07] **GEORGE:** Well, look it's not the question, so did Joe Ryan. He was able to tell them to go to hell, as far as that's concerned, although he didn't have the rank-and-file. He's got the contract with the ship owners. That's what counts. That's what counts. You see, it's not what it's in the law, but it's the one who carried it out.

[01:22:24] **HOWARD:** Well, the UE had contracts, existing contracts before the UE had existing contracts on the books with the employers before Taft-Hartley.

[01:22:32] **GEORGE:** Well look, these contracts, this UE came out, came up overnight. At that time, you know there was a period when a small group of people would get up on a box in front of a plant gate and start haranguing to the workers about the need for a union. And one, two, three they had enough signatures to make a start and before you knew it, they were able to file for an election. And win. That's how it was done in the Schenectady plant. 8,000 workers. It became the basic plan on the UE's—and believe me, I know how many people we had there. We had a small rank-and-file group, yes, I know that. In those days it was possible. So

consolidation, the government knew well enough that many of these unions were not so strongly consolidated, but the United Mine Workers consolidated for half a century! And it had the coal industry which at that time was key. It's key today too, but at that time, you didn't have a miner producing 15 tons of coal a day. Maybe two pounds of coal. There were 600,000 miners in the [?UMW?] union, and the control with the coal industry was decisive. Not like today.

[01:23:48] **HOWARD:** So it's strategic differences of industry—

[01:23:50] **GEORGE:** So sure it was! And then again you take Joe Murray, for a period Joe Murray said one time, he said he did it for religious purposes. But I believe it was true. But that only lasted for less than a year. After that he found that there were certain unions, there were many shops you couldn't organize and you had to file for elections. And the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] weren't entertained. So he had to sign. You take one of the first unions to break the line in the CIO, was the UAW. They were the first ones and they took the position—well, it's not because they're anti-communist, but they still had a lot of progressives at that time. But because the union had to safeguard its position as a union.

Oh, and in the United States in general, all unions with very, very few exceptions, are unions that don't have a built solid base. A union today, say the steelworkers' union, 5,000 workers in the local, they call a membership meeting. They'd have 50, 35, and that'd be the membership. They never get a membership to a large extent, except if they have a pre-strike meeting.

[01:25:16] **HOWARD:** Okay, a lot of people interpreted—and this is a general question I wanted to ask you, I'm glad you brought it up—and that is, what effect did the party, did left-wing forces have on the ideology of workers throughout the thirties and forties particularly? Was it minimal? Was it more than—

[01:25:30] **GEORGE:** It was minimal.

[01:25:31] **HOWARD:** It was minimal?

[01:25:31] **GEORGE:** It was minimal. For two reasons. Number one, is that the unions came up overnight. And communists became leaders of a million workers overnight. Then came the war, and the policies followed through the war period were not the kind that helped to develop a real class struggle spirit within the union, so consolidation process did not gel to a considerable extent by the time the Cold War came on. But when the Cold War came on, they were able to use the Taft-Hartley law, not only that but even then, you see. Don't minimize the amount of support the communists did have. Don't minimize that. Because many of these plants that were taken away from the communists—from the UE, don't forget, the UE lost more than half of its membership within a matter of years—by the various elections.

[01:26:38] **HOWARD:** Okay, but what kind of support did the left have?

[01:26:39] **GEORGE:** Okay, but look at what happens, see first of all, you take like the plant that—there was quite a number of plants where the vote was I think 40 percent for the left, 60 percent for the right. So in some of the cases, it was just a hairline margin. And don't forget, they had to do that by getting the priests. Many of these areas, Saint Louis, Detroit and other places, they had priests going house to house! And warning workers that they're acting against God if they vote for the communists. And they made it that the issue were communists, not the [inaudible]. So look, they had to work like hell, but—

[01:27:22] **HOWARD:** With the 40 percent supporting the party, did they support because they said, well the communists are our principal trade—

[01:27:26] **GEORGE:** Bear in mind this, you see, you take in this country, and this country has the freedom of the press, but this freedom of the press was in the hands of the people who were not with the labor movement. The result is that no matter how effective the communists or the left or whoever it is are within the union, in terms of building their solidarity and so forth, is that the enemy had, should have more of the say about your thinking, your ideology and so forth. Because what the people read—what do they get out of a labor paper? They don't get much out of it, it's not much of an ideological argument anyway. It's just merely an appeal to solidarity. But the ideological influence comes through the day-to-day reading of The L.A. Times or The New York Times, or whatever else they read. Or the T.V.

[01:28:18] **HOWARD:** Unless they get something different at the shop? They can get something different at the shop or in the union. One of the things is, I don't think the party in the period didn't carry a great deal of political education—

[01:28:28] **GEORGE:** Look, what you get in the shop is on the basis of the issues affecting your day-to-day—

[01:28:36] **HOWARD:** Probably the party is telling you during the war there's going to be—

[01:28:39] **GEORGE:** You can get excited like hell over the question of ventilation or something, sure. But in terms of your moral content, or in your terms of your relations with other workers, with other people, in terms of your political thinking, in terms of your thinking of education, or anything else, that's separated from the union. That's separated. The union had very little to say about it.

[01:29:05] **HOWARD:** They could have more say in it, right?

[01:29:07] **GEORGE:** Yes, but the question is what it is. Be realistic. See, that's what the situation is.

[01:29:12] **HOWARD:** Well, some locals did have extensive educational campaigns, you know that.

[01:29:18] **GEORGE:** Yes, the UAW puts out a tremendous amount of literature about you and your health, you and your safety and so forth, sure, it's all done. But remember, the bulk of the real, ideological stuff that goes into a person's head comes in it through other sources. And the best the union can do is try to influence through its PR [public relations] guys.

[01:29:40] **HOWARD:** I guess what I'm raising is the question of whether the party pushed that side aggressively?

[01:29:44] **GEORGE:** Well, even in the Labour Party. You take in England, they have a labor party, they've had one for fifty years. Or longer. They've had one since almost the turn of the century. But the Labour Party itself has to fight against an ideological force that's much, much stronger than it is. Assuming that the Labour Party has an ideological position that's strong enough. But even, as a matter of fact, the Labour Party became the second party, just like the Democratic Party here. And the distinction is not very much, except in one respect, now this is that it is the consolidation of the working class as a class. So there's a class element.

[01:30:26] **HOWARD:** A political expression. I guess that the question I'm raising is an old one, and that is was the left—were people that were known as communist in the shop supported because they were communists and they respected their ideology? Or because they were trade unionists?

[01:30:39] **GEORGE:** No. They were not supported because of their ideology.

[01:30:42] **HOWARD:** Okay.

[01:30:43] **GEORGE:** Some people became known communists, but as a matter of fact, in the great majority of these unions where the communists were leaders, or jointly with other left-wingers as leaders, they were not—

[END PART THREE/BEGIN PART FOUR]

The ideology represents, but in terms of its weapon as a splitter, as a splitter.

[01:31:08] **HOWARD:** I see what you're saying.

[01:31:09] **GEORGE:** Mostly with the idea that well, people should have their idea that the communists can have their ideas and you can have yours and so on. And if we're to have a union, that's solid, we cannot make the distinction between different ideologies. But I mean, that's a simple argument which is even used today.

[01:31:25] **HOWARD:** Sure, civil liberties.

[01:31:26] **GEORGE:** But the point is that the Cold War made the distinction, yeah different people yes, but not communists.

[01:31:31] **HOWARD:** Right, right. Okay, let's see if I have any other—okay, I think I covered most of what I wanted to ask. I think that's basically most of the questions that I wanted to ask. You've been very helpful. I want to thank you a lot for that.

[01:31:52] **GEORGE:** Well, I'll give you that pamphlet of the paper.

[01:31:53] **HOWARD:** Okay, yeah that'd be great.

[END PART FOUR]